



# **Strategy and Impact of the Iraq Transition Initiative**

**OTI in Iraq (2003 – 2006)**

## **Executive Summary**

Prepared for the Office of Transition Initiatives  
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance  
United States Agency for International Development

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HDA-I-00-03-00124-00  
September 27, 2006

## **Executive Summary**

### **Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)**

The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) was established by USAID in 1994 following a recommendation by Ambassador Thomas Eagleburger, who felt that the United States needed some kind of means beyond humanitarian assistance to support political transitions in nations that were emerging from prolonged ethnic or religious and civil conflict, an all too frequent situation following the collapse of Socialist regimes as well as ethnic conflicts in Africa and elsewhere. It was tasked with steering post-conflict countries toward democracy, jump-starting destroyed economies, launching or restoring viable political, social, and economic institutions, mitigating existing or renewed conflict, and promoting reconciliation. OTI intervenes rapidly and undertakes quick-impact interventions through short-term grants that catalyze broader change. Most of its primarily in-kind grants have democratic process as their objective. OTI seeks to stay in a new country no more than two to three years. In recent years, USAID Missions have adopted all or major parts of OTI programs into the Missions longer-term development portfolio.

### **Iraq Transition Initiative**

The Office of Transition Initiatives began its program in Iraq in early April 2003, concluded implementing new activities at the end of April 2006, and ceased all operations by the end of July 2006. OTI's activities in Iraq totaled \$417.6 million, with the majority going to a small grants program implemented through a contract with Development Alternatives, Inc. This program, known as the Iraq Transition Initiative (ITI), pursued three strategic objectives:

1. Support critical activities that build and sustain Iraqi confidence in the development of a participatory, stable, and democratic Iraq.
2. Identify and fill crucial gaps in the U.S. government assistance efforts at national and local levels.
3. Increase public support for the interim government.

OTI's fast-paced assistance initially met critical relief and rehabilitation needs – providing short-term employment, restoring basic government and community services, increasing Iraqi access to information and communication, and encouraging protection of human rights. Within a few months in country, OTI came to focus on four program objectives that fell under the three broader strategic objectives:

1. Increase citizen participation in social/political/economic life.
2. Enhance capacity of local and national governments.
3. Prevent, manage, mitigate, and resolve conflict.
4. Encourage respect for human rights and foster peace and reconciliation.

## **Evaluation Purpose**

As it ended program activities in Iraq, the Office of Transition Initiatives sought to explore through an external evaluation the successes and failures, the strong and weak points, and the lessons learned from three years in Iraq. The fundamental questions asked focused on program strategy and effectiveness. Together they are a solid measure of performance.

Strategy in this context is more concerned with short-term ingenuity and constancy in achieving medium-term objectives than with long-term strategic vision. OTI program implementation is strategic, rather than tactical, when it maintains congruity of short-term activities with overall strategic objectives. Program effectiveness relates to the degree to which grant activities were appropriately targeted and implemented.

## **Methodology**

Dr. Philip Boyle, a senior associate of Social Impact, Inc. (Arlington, VA) carried out the final evaluation. Although some program documentation exists, most data were collected by means of one-on-one interviews with 68 people. Substantial information and assistance were also provided by OTI advisors Eleanor Bedford and Dustin Felix, who carried out related studies on operations and the OTI-military relationship. Since no field trip was made to Iraq, the evaluator was unable to interview grantees or other stakeholders inside that country. A majority of interviews were conducted between March 25 and April 1, 2006 during the OTI/Iraq Close-Out and Lessons Learned Retreat in Amman, Jordan. Most of the remaining interviews were conducted in person or by telephone between April 11 and May 19, 2006.

## **Conclusions**

1. OTI successfully carried out activities that directly addressed its first strategic objective of supporting critical activities that build and sustain Iraqi confidence in the development of a participatory, stable, and democratic Iraq. OTI support to civil society organizations laid a firm foundation for a more inclusive and participatory democracy. Neighborhood and district councils were empowered as grantees. Substantial economic benefits were generated through short-term employment grants that also served to demonstrate highly visible governmental services to neighborhoods. Solid groundwork was also carried out in human rights, women's rights, property rights, and the documentation of war crimes.
2. OTI successfully pursued its second strategic objective of identifying and filling crucial gaps in U.S. government assistance efforts at national and local levels. OTI was on the ground in Iraq with the first wave of U.S. civilian assistance and ended up by leading it. Through the Abuse Prevention Unity (APU), OTI quickly identified and responded to human rights issues in property rights and mass graves. When other U.S. agencies were still setting up, OTI filled assistance gaps in property rights, human rights, women's rights, civil society start-ups, war crimes documentation, media activities, local governmental strengthening, and short-term employment/clean-up projects. When USAID requested that OTI redirect substantial funds into short-term employment and neighborhood clean-up projects to address the insurgency, OTI proved itself so effective that Congress granted it substantial monies in late 2004 to continue this effort through 2005 and beyond.

3. OTI also appropriately carried out activities in support of its third strategic objective of increasing public support for the interim government. Central governmental institutions were rapidly rehabilitated and equipped with work stations. Facilities identified for provincial, district, and neighborhood councils were rehabilitated and equipped, and numerous in-kind grants were made to local authorities for rehabilitation and employment activities. Many public schools and health centers were rehabilitated. Between December 2003 and June 2004, OTI participated in the design of a national governmental elections framework and process that jump-started work continued under the USAID Mission.
4. OTI made important contributions to strengthening democratic processes and increasing momentum for peaceful resolution of conflict in its elections framework work, in jump-starting civil society, and in using local councils as grantees in over two thousand rehabilitation and employment/clean-up projects.
5. While it is clear that OTI was on target in its program, it is difficult to judge the magnitude of objective achievement, because OTI did not define end states or develop indicators to track progress toward these outcomes. Some public opinion polling of population perceptions was carried out in 2003 but was later abandoned for security reasons.
6. From all evidence, OTI had significant impact on standing up governmental and other public institutions through the rehabilitation of offices and the equipment and supply kits that followed. These “ministry in the box” grants targeted national ministries and provincial directorates and were particularly prevalent in 2003. Provincial and local councils (district and neighborhood) and schools and some health centers were targeted through a similar approach.
7. OTI had important impact on the creation of civil society in Iraq by jump-starting support for a large number of organizations that became major participants in an emerging independent civil society. From few, if any, independent organizations under the previous regime, except in the autonomous northern area (Iraqi Kurdistan), there are now hundreds of Iraqi NGOs or unregistered equivalents. In the north, existing civil society was strengthened and continued its expansion. While not alone in building a burgeoning civil society, OTI was certainly a major player and was in action before most other assistance organizations.
8. OTI played an important role in building a legal foundation and process for two elections and a constitutional referendum by seconding an experienced staff member to the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for this purpose. By the time this staff member left Iraq in June 2004, the elections’ process had been successfully jump-started and was able to play itself out with little disruption and steadily increasing Iraqi participation.
9. OTI played an important role in addressing conflicting property claims and human rights violations in the first months of presence in country. It pioneered work with freed prisoners, mass graves, and women rights. It supported the Iraqi Special Tribunal by rehabilitating the court house and providing grants designed to establish mechanisms and units able to collect, secure, and store documentary evidence.
10. The OTI program shifted strategically between 2003 and 2006 through a combination of internal impetus and external events. The program was reoriented from its initial mode with the arrival of the first official Country Representative in October 2003. At this time, it was narrowed

to four program objectives. Pursuit of these objectives was interrupted by a serious rise in the insurgency in April 2004, following which OTI developed a close working relationship with the U.S. military and emphasized short-term employment grants. The last Country Representative deepened and intensified the OTI-military partnership after March 2005, while preserving many of the activities of other focus areas, in part by packaging them with employment projects.

11. There were significant expenditures month by month over the life of the program that supported specific stabilizing or conflict mitigation activities. Thus, in the run-up and immediate aftermath of the January 2005 elections, while the transitional government was being chosen and seated, grant expenditures were fairly high. These expenditures would also peak or increase prior to and in the sensitive periods following the constitutional referendum (October 2005) and the December 2005 elections for the permanent government. OTI activities were extended from December 2005 to June 2006 in large part to program an additional \$35 million dollars to employ Iraqis in the run up to the December elections and government formation in its aftermath.

12. Because OTI found a clear niche in the transition process, successful program linkage to the USAID Mission is under way. OTI demonstrated what was possible and workable in community stabilization and much of its program served as a direct precursor to the current USAID follow-on program.

13. OTI has also clearly had major impact on the U.S military in Iraq, paving the way for future close civilian and military collaboration in Iraq and other countries. While this probably would not have occurred without the insurgency, it has certainly demonstrated the value of joining these two cultures in collaborative “win-win” activities.

14. Clear legacies and spearheading efforts of the Iraq Transition Initiative include development of a key set of local partner NGOs, military liaisons from combat brigades, the military-OTI partnership, remote operations, strategic shifting of programming, and effective program linkage to follow-on activities of the USAID Mission.

15. More documentation of program decisions and operations should have occurred in a program of this size and importance. Considering the length of time involved and considerable prominence of OTI’s role in political stabilization and transition in Iraq, there is very little written material on program strategy and operational decisions.

16. Insufficient effort was expended in gathering feedback on grant results and population impact (see Recommendations 6 and 7). While the contractor organization was relied upon to do monitoring and evaluation, its task order contained no funding or staff position to do so. Although security was an issue, more could have been done to address this information gap by employing key local NGO partners. By engaging them in this activity early on in program activities, these NGOs would have developed their methods and capacities in monitoring and evaluation.

## **Recommendations**

1. OTI should rethink and revise formal strategy statements as it shifts strategically to changing events in a given country. The team building retreats set the stage for this, but little follow-up appears to occur. Since there are rarely written OTI documents conveying the shifts in focus or emphasis of what follow up action is taken, OTI field management should issue to staff brief

memoranda documenting what has changed and where the program is heading over the following six months. If a major strategic document has been envisaged, this follow-up function could be assisted by senior advisors or contracted out.

2. Conceptualizing the relationship between strategic and program objectives and between program objectives and program activities in an objective tree would be a useful exercise to ensure congruity and clarity of various levels of action. If the program shifts strategically, the objective tree can be revised accordingly.

3. Lessons learned in the military-OTI partnership in Iraq may be applied in similar situations in the future. While OTI shares some common culture with the U.S. military, there are many differences that required OTI in Iraq to assert its own philosophy and methodology. How OTI successfully maintained its uniqueness in Iraq, as it worked in collaboration with the military should be understood by all staff for use in future such arrangements.

4. The early identification and capacity building of a key set of NGOs is a useful model that should be emulated in future post-conflict situations, where civil society has remained undeveloped or has been largely destroyed. They can become trusted partners for OTI activities, when other alternatives are limited.

5. While adapting strategically to changing circumstances, OTI should maintain as wide a variety of preferred themes and core competencies as possible. In the same way that OTI found ways to be creative in its sequencing and packaging of activities around short-term employment, it should continue to seek opportunities within program mandates to shift the funding mix, when feedback indicates the need for changes in activities or target groups. To do this it will need to increase feedback from activities.

6. Some reasonable means to secure feedback on grant results and impact should be devised in every OTI country program. Given the nature of what OTI does, this does not mean developing rigid objectives and performance indicators in most country contexts. Nor does it require extensive surveys or other formal methods. Hiring local NGOs to investigate program results and impacts would be invaluable, whether or not security allows OTI staff to observe directly.

7. Although any M&E system should remain as simple as possible, care must be taken to focus attention on results and outcomes (impacts), rather than on inputs and lower-level outputs. This does not mean that every activity type will be equally susceptible to results measurement, nor that not being able to measure some activities should exclude them from the grant mix. It would be useful to cast this in terms of measuring major grant types, such as work with civil society, media, elections, women's rights, participatory local government, national governmental functioning, and so on. Program objectives may also be formulated in such a way that simple measures based on polling or sampling of key informants yield a sense of what has been accomplished. This will certainly require building in an M&E capacity in the task order to contractors in future country interventions. This would include a funded position and a budget to collect and/or analyze feedback from program grantees.